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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 05 MADRID 001132

SIPDIS

DEPARTMENT FOR EUR/WE, NEA/RA, AF/RA

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PINR](#) [PREL](#) [IR](#) [IZ](#) [SY](#) [SP](#) [MR](#)
SUBJECT: NEA A/S WELCH MEETINGS WITH SPANISH OFFICIALS
OCTOBER 23

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Classified By: DCM Arnold Chacon for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

11. (C) SUMMARY. NEA A/S Welch, accompanied by DCM, met with FM Moratinos, Director General for the Mediterranean, Magreb and Near Orient Fidel Sendagorta, and Policy Planning Director Andres Ortega on October 23 to discuss a wide range of issues including the Middle East Peace Process (MEPP), the Magreb, and Western Sahara, Syria, Lebanon, Iran, Iraq and Mauritania. In response to Welch's overview on the MEPP and the importance of a coordinated approach based on Quartet principles, Moratinos offered to help with keeping the process on track and said, "after her next trip, tell Secretary Rice to call me so I can reinforce her points." Policy Planning Director Ortega said that President Zapatero planned to travel to the Middle East in the near future to push for solutions, although he could not offer details on a possible itinerary. GOS officials, most likely Deputy Secretary-equivalent Angel Lossada, plan to visit Baghdad soon and Welch welcomed efforts to help integrate Iraq into the international community, adding that a Moratinos visit would be helpful. Spain believes Syria will move in a positive direction over the next few months, and that Moratinos' consistent outreach to the Syrian regime creates opportunities for it to align with the West rather than Iran.

12. (C) Presented with our views that the democratic process should be restored in Mauritania, Sendagorta argued that since its military gave the country form, we must work with the military to accomplish our goals. Spain's priorities in Mauritania were counter-terrorism, immigration, and to a lesser extent, fishing rights, and Sendagorta urged a quick solution that would prevent a political vacuum or armed conflict. He said Spain wants to engage with USG officials, especially the AF bureau, on the issue of Mauritania. Welch encouraged additional cooperation, since the US and Spain have different approaches, and reinforced that point with Ortega as well. END SUMMARY.

13. (C) NEA A/S Welch, accompanied by DCM, met with FM Moratinos, Director General for the Mediterranean, Magreb and Near Orient Fidel Sendagorta, and Policy Planning Director Andres Ortega on October 23 to discuss a wide range of issues including the Middle East Peace Process (MEPP), the Magreb, and Western Sahara, Syria, Lebanon, Iran, Iraq and Mauritania. Moratinos' staff had warned in advance that scheduling issues would allow only a brief meeting, but Moratinos, effusive in his welcome, devoted 45 minutes to reviewing multilateral issues. Sendagorta, accompanied by his Deputy Director Alberto Ucelay, hosted Welch for a two-hour lunch meeting at the MFA. Ortega, accompanied by two other members of President Zapatero's policy planning team, met

with Welch at the Moncloa Presidential Complex. Ortega was more in "receive mode" but asked many thoughtful questions about U.S. policy developments, eager to take advantage of the discussion. Welch also conducted a well-attended press roundtable that resulted in several articles in the local press and coverage by the wire services.

PEACE PROCESS

14. (C) A/S Welch shared information about next steps in the peace process and appealed for European regional cooperation in support of Quartet principles to create, "a reality both sides can't back away from." FM Moratinos agreed that the Arab community had not fulfilled its potential to positively influence the situation and that it was important to avoid a vacuum while a new Israel government was being formed. In response to A/S Welch's point that Abu Mazen needed to, "play it smartly," Moratinos said that the EU wanted to engage with Arab states to encourage them to explore new options; reconciliation efforts by Egypt could be constructive. Welch noted that it was becoming difficult to gauge the level of seriousness of the many proposals floating around and it was essential to maintain coordination through the Quartet Process to keep the focus on results. Moratinos offered to help with keeping the process on track and said, "after her next trip, tell Secretary Rice to call me so I can reinforce her points." In response to Sendagorta's question about the formation of a new Israeli government and its impact on the process, Welch said that it was important to show progress in the new year, e.g., slowdown in settlement construction, fewer roadblocks, improved security, and enhanced economic activity. He noted that it was important to query the new Israeli government privately, without hard

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stances that would force its hand. During the November Quartet meeting, the Parties should address the structure and goals of the full peace process, with a focus on expected results by the end of the year. There should be no public characterization of positions. Policy Planning Director Ortega said that President Zapatero planned to travel to the Middle East in the near future to push for solutions, although he could not offer details on a possible itinerary.

SYRIA

15. (C) On Syria, Moratinos said, "we call it as we see it, despite France thinking that we are too optimistic." When Welch commented that we agreed with the results-based approach contained in the EU letter to Syria, Moratinos said, "I have taken risks reaching out to the Syrians, but I know the personalities and the issues." He continued, "Syria wants to be part of the West, rather than aligning with Iran they want to be welcomed in Paris, and moreover, we need them to conclude any comprehensive peace plan." "Walid (al-Muallem) wants to normalize with the U.S.," Moratinos emphasized. The other factor Moratinos noted was that drawing Syria closer to the West would serve to marginalize Iranian efforts to exert influence. A/S Welch remarked on the Moratinos/EU letter on Lebanon that was sent to Syria, spelling out benchmarks for improved behavior. He emphasized that if Syria seeks further engagement with the international community, it must take specific, demonstrable actions.

16. (C) Sendagorta claimed that Moratinos, engagement with Syria paying off; others in the EU have come around to Spain's position. Welch amplified his point, saying that while the U.S. agrees with an approach based on quantifiable results, a fuller assessment of Syrian actions is needed, particularly with regard to Lebanon and foreign fighter flows. Sendagorta thought that Syria would be more careful in the future, given the dramatic, positive evolution of

situation in Iraq. He agreed foreign fighters can do the Syrians lots of harm. Sendagorta added that Spain worried for safety of its UNIFIL troops. In response to Welch's query whether Spain talked to Syrians regarding border camps, Sendagorta said "not recently," but that in July 2008 Spain had secured a commitment from Syrian President al-Asad. Welch said that Syria needed to hear more on this issue from the international community. Overall, Sendagorta summarized, Spain thinks Syria will move in constructive ways in the next few months, in contrast to Iran. Welch reiterated to all Spanish interlocutors that a vigilant UNIFIL was essential to prevent Hizballah from reasserting itself and that Syria shouldn't be allowed to dabble to gain concessions without implementing real reform.

IRAN

17. (C) In response to Sendagorta's question, Welch said there was no decision on opening an US Interests Section in Iran. An Interests Section idea, especially if it was empowered to issue visas, could be useful, but it must also serve a broader purpose. Welch appealed for more effective political approach/policy on Iran; the EU must be tougher on Iran if our approach of calibrated response was to work. Welch reviewed Iran's counterproductive efforts in Syria, Lebanon and Iraq with all his interlocutors. He asked the Spanish to consider if there are any creative options to add to a coordinated set of incentives and disincentives for the Iranian regime. He also called for more coordinated financial actions, and ensuring that Iran would not benefit from any new international financial instruments, e.g., excluding Iran from bank deposit protections.

IRAQ

18. (C) On Iraq, Sendagorta said GOS officials, most likely Deputy Secretary-equivalent Angel Lossada, would visit soon and Welch welcomed efforts to help integrate Iraq into the international community, adding that a Moratinos visit would be helpful. Sendagorta said Spain was ready to start a new chapter in Iraq, focusing on commercial activity and CT cooperation, issues that they had discussed with Iraq's ambassador to Spain. Ortega also said that while it was difficult for the PSOE administration, Spain would engage

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with Iraq, in a non-military way, if it could protect its personnel and address security concerns. Spain wants to do its part to stabilize Iraq within the current political context. Welch briefed on the pending Iraq SOFA, which needs to be concluded before year's end, and explained that Russian FM Lavrov's public remarks that Russia might consider renewal of UN Iraq mandate were unhelpful because they served to reduce pressure on Iraqi leaders to deal with SOFA issue. The UN mandate was not ideal since it limited Iraqi sovereignty and had negative financial implications. He explained that the US SOFA was very forward leaning, aimed at giving Iraq jurisdiction and room to maneuver. Welch also noted that political involvement by Spain had its own merit and might help protect against Iranian intrusions in Iraqi domestic politics. Alberto Ucelay asked to be kept informed of the date of the upcoming Iraq Neighbors Conference, as it might be the logical point to arrange a Lossada visit to Baghdad.

MAGREB & WESTERN SAHARA

19. (C) With regard to the Magreb, Welch described the recent Libya settlement that would take the US-Libya bilateral relationship to a new level, in addition to increasingly

strong cooperation with Algeria and Morocco. Recognizing Spain's efforts, he said that given worrisome trends toward violent extremism in the Magreb, it was ever more important to encourage broader political reconciliation and foster significant improvements in intra-Magreb cooperation. Welch and Moratinos recapped counter-terrorism and stabilization efforts in the Magreb. Moratinos said Spain believed former Ambassador Ross could be an effective UNSYG Special Representative on Western Sahara and that, "we are telling the Moroccans to give him support." He acknowledged Moroccan unhappiness with the dismissal of Van Walsum and said that Ross would need to facilitate communications and build trust among all parties to the negotiations. Moratinos suggested a coordination meeting including Spain, France, Algeria, Morocco and the U.S. on the margins of the NATO ministerial. Welch replied that Secretary Rice had attempted a similar meeting during her trip to the region but the Moroccans and Algerians did not respond positively; timing would be a factor for another attempt during the NATO Ministerial.

¶10. (C) Welch and Sendagorta reviewed Moratinos' idea of arranging meetings of for Secretary Rice and her French and Spanish counterparts with Morocco and Algeria to breath life into Western Sahara issue. Welch encouraged the Spanish to develop the initiative for further consideration. Ortega related Spain's view that the Manhasset process itself was critically important, apart from whether or not there were any near-term chances of achieving an accord. While Spain would officially support a referendum, a referendum would only be useful if validated a solution rather than calling for end results. Ortega suggested that the Algerians could be moved forward in their thinking by engaging them indirectly through the Union for the Mediterranean mechanism. In addition, he agreed with Welch that the Western Sahara dispute would not be solved while the border was closed. If Morocco and Algeria could integrate their tourism sectors and enhance economic ties, it would build a foundation of trust that would facilitate other discussions. However, Ortega admitted that the Barcelona Process had never been able to impact the intra-Magreb or Morocco-Algeria dynamics.

MAURITANIA

¶11. (C) According to Sendagorta, Spain views Mauritania as part of the Magreb, in contrast to the US and France who manage the relationship within an African context. Asking Welch to convey Spanish views that Mauritania was a fragile country and therefore, a target for al-Qaeda, Sendagorta argued that since its military gave the country form, we must work with the military to accomplish our goals. Spain's priorities were counter-terrorism, immigration, and to a lesser extent, fishing rights, and Sendagorta urged a quick solution that would prevent a political vacuum or armed conflict. He opined that it would be ideal if the military stepped back and allowed a "Turkish model" to emerge. Spain doesn't want a failed state a few miles from its territory in the Canary Islands.

¶12. (C) In response to Welch's points on the need to

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reinforce the democratic process, Sendagorta clarified that Spain was not weak on democracy, but wanted to find the right balance to bring long term solutions. Sendagorta claimed France was coming around to Spain's views on this matter. Given ongoing consultations in Mauritania regarding the presidential powers and the parliament's role, Sendagorta believed an agreement was possible by year end. Also, Spain thought there should be movement to liberate the ex-president without putting him back in power. Spain's Ambassador in Mauritania reported the ex-president was well treated and the Parliament was still operational; hence there was a measure of freedom of expression. Sendagorta said Spain wants to engage with USG officials, especially the AF bureau, on the

issue of Mauritania with USG officials. Welch encouraged additional cooperation, since the US and Spain have different approaches, and reinforced that point with Ortega as well.

MULTILATERAL COORDINATION

¶13. (C) Sendagorta said the GOS was impressed with USG administration's management of many interconnecting foreign policy issues in the second Bush term. Welch reiterated our desire for European cooperation across the board. Sendagorta said the EU working toward an integrated approach to foreign policy, despite many difficulties as decreasing sovereignty among EU countries engendered competition among them, leading to uncoordinated foreign policy initiatives (as Welch had noted during his presentation on the MEPP).

COMMENT

¶14. (C) Sendagorta's insights on the competition among EU countries to gain some sort of foreign policy prestige certainly applies to Spain's efforts to position itself as a key player in the Middle East. Spain has already announced that it plans to initiate a major Middle East initiative during its January-June 2010 EU Presidency. Apart from Foreign Minister Moratino's long-term personal interest in the issues, Spain also views itself as the most influential Mediterranean country, serving as the primary link between Africa and Europe based on geography, population flows and history. With Spain actively campaigning for support to have Barcelona designated as the headquarters of the Union for the Mediterranean, it is seeking broad support for its candidacy. Spain emphasizes to Muslim countries that, given the history of Andalusia, it can serve as an important bridge culture and it has a unique understanding of Islam that allows "strong fraternal ties." For example, King Juan Carlos offered to host the Saudi-sponsored 2008 World Muslim League Inter-Faith Conference. King Juan Carlos and Spanish officials make regular swings through the Middle East to promote commercial ties and investment opportunities. Moreover, Spain "markets" itself to Gulf countries and other states with funds to invest as the natural link to Latin America, claiming that it has the special understanding and technical skills necessary to successfully expand commercial ties in Latin America. Apart from Spain's quest for foreign policy prestige and commercial opportunities, it also recognizes the potential challenges and opportunities of increasing Muslim immigration to Spain, from the Magreb and other regions as well.

SENDAGORTA BIO

¶15. (U) Fidel Sendagorta is a new contact for the Embassy since he took over his portfolio in August 2008. This was our first opportunity to hold an extended meeting with him. His unclassified biographic information follows:

Sendagorta was born in 1956. He has a degree in Law. He joined the Spanish Diplomatic Corps in 1984 and served in the embassies in Japan (1984), Cuba (1988), and Morocco (Cultural Counselor in 1996). Between 1993-96, Sendagorta was Advisor to the Secretary of State for International Cooperation and Latin America, and to the Foreign Affairs Minister. In 1999, as Counselor in the Spanish Permanent Representation to the EU, he coordinated planning for the April 2002 EuroMed Summit held in Valencia. In 2002 he served as MFA's Deputy Director General of the Policy Planning and Analysis Bureau. In October 2007 he was appointed Special Ambassador for Mediterranean Affairs. In August 2008, he was appointed

Director General for the Mediterranean, Magreb and Near Orient.

¶16. (C) Sendagorta was thoughtful in his comments on issues in his portfolio, and did not present an ideological view. He seemed to be trying to create a better dialogue with us on Middle Eastern issues, given strains in the past.

¶17. (U) Assistant Secretary Welch cleared this cable.

AGUIRRE